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Route 125 study calls for more town-airport collaboration

By Paul Tennant

ptennant@eagletribune.com

---- — NORTH ANDOVER — Lawrence Municipal Airport, occupying a large expanse of land between Sutton Street and Route 125, has been located in North Andover since 1957.

Yet there is no collaboration between the airport and the town that hosts it, according to John Mullin, who is directing the writing of a redevelopment plan for the Route 125 Corridor. Mullin, a professor of urban planning and associate director of the Center for Economic Development at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, urged the selectmen Monday night to reach out to the Lawrence Airport Commission.

The airport and the town should explore ways they can work together to promote development along the Route 125 Corridor, which runs from Sutton Street to the Haverhill city line. The redevelopment plan is still a work in progress, but Mullin and one of the graduate students working with him, Jonathan Cooper, presented some highlights of their recommendations to the selectmen at their Monday night meeting.

Mullin said the airport, one of the busiest in Massachusetts, is a “regional asset.” Cooper said 1600 Osgood St., the massive yellow brick building that used to house Western Electric, then AT&T and finally Lucent, the “most important asset” along the Corridor.

The town does collaborate with 1600 Osgood St., Cooper noted. Several town departments, including the schools, conservation, planning, health and community development, have their offices there. Yet “the collaboration with 1600 Osgood St. does not extend to the rest of the Corridor,” he said.

While the selectmen commissioned the plan with the intent of promoting economic development along Route 125, Mullin and Cooper said the town should take steps to protect the Barker farm, which has operated since 1642.

The Corridor at present “doesn’t support non-automotive access,” Mullin said. The area is bypassed by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority and “underserved” by the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority, he said.

“Is it beneficial to have a sewer in the Corridor?” Selectman William Gordon asked.

Mullin said companies like having sewer service available for their facilities. Asked what industries are expanding their operations, Mullin said pharmaceutical manufacturers are among the fastest-growing companies.

Town Manager Andrew Maylor said he expects Mullin and his team of graduate students will soon complete the study as well as an action plan.